



# SOFT SHADOW

A JuzoHai Zine

© 2019, *SOFT SHADOW*: A JuzoHai Zine

Juzou Honenuki & Shihai Kuroiro  
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# Double-Feature

Writer, Nate Nox

Illustrator, Kelly Latham

Shihai slips in and out of the shadows as they walk back from the theater, the lights of the marquee making it into a game of cat and mouse. Under the streetlights, he's too exposed. Everyone can see him, but that's not what's got his heart firing like a machine gun. He's not worried about *everyone*. He's worried about Juzo, who is walking next to him, hands jammed in the pockets of his letterman jacket. He's worried that with one look, Juzo will see the longing written on his face and the anxiety thrumming through his clenched hands. He's worried he's an open book.

So he melts into the darkness, and tries not to panic. He's a hero-in-training. He's a cool guy. He can handle a confession or two, can't he? Or at least he thought he could, when he asked Juzo out on this date that wasn't quite a date, losing his nerve at the last second and calling it "bro time" instead. Bro time that no one else was invited to, cause that's normal, right? Just a movie and a romantic walk back, where maybe something would finally happen to release all this tension that had been building between them.

They spent an hour and a half in the dark, fingers just missing one another as they reached for a shared tub of popcorn, both wanting that connection, both too nervous to take the final step. They'd been playing this game of chicken for months now, and despite both being brave guys....they both kept swerving. Now, the movie was over and all hope seemed lost. If he couldn't grab Juzo's hand in the safety and plausible deniability of the dark, what hope did he have here in the tragically well-lit street? It was a good plan, and he wonders why he couldn't just stick to it.

"So, d'ya like the movie...?" Shihai is clearly a master conversationalist.

"Huh? Oh, yeah. The flying guy was pretty cool. I didn't understand the part with the robot though."

They lapse back into silence.

*Yeah, no hope at all.*

Especially when they feel the familiar pinprick of eyes on them. Straight ahead, there's another group of teens, clearly on a group date, and clearly freaked out by the spooky-looking duo of Juzo and Shihai. A shadow and a skeleton, just trying to live life and find love, never able to escape the casing that marks them as inherently *other*. And that's the crux of the problem, really.

They might be heroes-in-training and elite students and good friends, but they still carry the scars of a lifetime of creeping people out, just by existing. Quirk discrimination might be fading, but for outliers with unnerving physical manifestations, it can still feel...lonely. Especially when it comes to love and desire. They're great friends and lately, it feels like they could be something more, but years of alienation and bad first-impressions make fear of rejection a near insurmountable obstacle. Wordlessly, they slip away from the main street and towards the parkway. The tension melts away in time with the fading lights and soon, both boys are letting loose. Here in the abandoned dark, there's no one to remind them of their differences. They can just be themselves.

Juzo softens the concrete of the pathway and begins swimming laps while Shihai swings from the trees' shadows like some quirky Tarzan. Worries about want and wanting give way to lighthearted laughter and impromptu races through the deserted park. There's nothing but the sound of their shouts and lapping of concrete waves, interjected with the occasional squawk of a bird displaced by Shihai's acrobatics. They're in sight of UA's gleaming towers when a new sound breaks through.



It sounds like...meowing? Maybe? *But it's so faint...*

Shihai, the big softy, can't help but investigate, sliding down the alley and towards the mews before Juzo can say "Stranger Danger." Jeez, the guy really is hopeless. Juzo follows behind, ready to pounce if this turns out to be some "Free Puppy" kinda scam. He wishes he had a nice baseball bat to complete his jock aesthetic and scare off any potential creeps.

"Hey, seriously! Hold on! At least wait for me...if you get kidnapped Kendou is going to *kill* me!"

Luckily for Shihai's safety and Kendou's criminal record, the only thing they find is a box of kittens, no villains or traps in sight. The pitch-skinned boy squats down to the open cardboard box, where six- no, seven- tiny fluff balls are rolling around and clamouring for attention (and food).

"Aww, look at the poor things. What kinda jerk would leave them here? I mean, this far back... it's lucky we heard them at all!" As righteous indignation takes over, Juzo can't help but smile. Shihai's such a tender-hearted guy. It's part of what's going to make him such a great hero, and Juzo feels honored that he gets to call him a friend. Even if he sometimes wishes they could be something more.

There's no question of what they're going to do. After all, a huge part of heroing is completing rescue missions, no matter the danger! Or in this case, *er...* the lack of it. Plus, they both have giant soft spots for animals, maybe because animals never seem to judge. Like puppies, parakeets, and all manner of other pets, the kittens react to the duo's hearts, not their faces. And the boys aren't about to betray that trust. Soon enough, they're loaded up on kittens, each little one tucked away in the warmth of their jackets and ready to be smuggled to safety. Three kittens for Shihai and his punk leather number, four for Juzo's roomier letterman. A match made in heaven.



"Remember, play it cool."

"No problem, I'm the coolest."

They're almost back at the dorms, kittens (and kitten supplies) hidden in their jackets in an attempt to avoid UA's strict pet policy. It's not like they *want* to break the rules, but all the vets are closed, and the little ones clearly need supervision, at least until the

morning. So, a tiny bit of misdirection is actually the heroic thing to do, right?

They slide into the common room, and Juzo's actually whistling, like every misbehaving kid hiding every broken vase in every family comedy ever made. Whistling (and jacket bellies undulating with squirming kittens), the duo run straight into Class 1-B's self-appointed dorm parents. Kendou and Tetsutetsu look down on them, bemused smiles pulling against their stern "Out After Curfew" faces. The boys are doomed.

"So...did the movie run late? Or maybe villains attacked? Or *maybe* you took a nice, long stroll through the park?" Kendou's staring at them with eyes that seem to see everything, and Juzo can't help the blush that spreads across his too-expressive face. He needs to get them out of this before their covers are blown. He grabs Shihai's hand and pulls the other boy up the stairs, panic overriding his general shyness.

"Uh, all of the above? Not villains but er- Anyway, gotta go! Tooth brushing! Because of all the...sugar! Yeah! Dental hygiene!" He pulls a giggling Shihai up the stairs after him, not sparing a glance to see if Kendou and TetsuTetsu bought his excuse.

Kendou and TetsuTetsu burst into great gulping laughs as the boys take the stairs two at a time. They're clearly smitten, and *clearly* smuggling kittens (if the paw sticking out of Shihai's studded packet was any indication). Probably, Kendou should call them out on it, but she'll give them the night. After all, she'd hate to interrupt the magic, and it's not like they can do anything about the little stowaways this late anyway.



Their escape (somewhat) successful, the boys barrel down the hallway, Shihai using their still-connected hands to pull Juzo towards his room, which is closer to the stairs and already nice and clean (from back when he thought he'd actually pull the trigger on this date). He opens the door, wincing a bit at the mood lighting that he'd carefully arranged this afternoon. Hopefully Juzo doesn't notice? Shihai flexes his hand, realizing he's still connected to Juzo. He'd like to stay this way, but the motion draws Juzo's attention and he's got no choice but to blushingly disconnect. He uses the kittens as an excuse, unzipping his jacket and giving the horde a chance to explore the surprisingly cozy room. Juzo follows suit, eyes flying around the room as he takes in this new facet of his crush's personality. He's been here before, but never alone...and it's never felt so intimate.





Lathorne 2019



He distracts himself with the kittens, allowing their cute antics to guide him through his nerves and into a more natural state of being. Shihai follows a similar path, corralling the little explorers while the invisible blush fades from his face and his heart finds a gentler rhythm.

Sure, there's a boy in his room, after hours, with the doors closed. A *cute* boy.

But that boy's Juzo, so it'll be okay. The whole reason he likes him is because he's such a solid and kind-hearted individual. He doesn't need to panic. He can just...see where this latest adventure takes them, right?

His mind calmer, Shihai allows himself to relax into his space, sprawling across his bed and counting kittens. He rumbles in approval as Juzo follows his lead, splaying out on the floor and promptly becoming cat furniture.

"They sure are friendly."

"No kidding. It's like they've never met a stranger." Shihai pauses, giggling a bit at their ridiculous flight from the common rooms, "So do you think they bought it?"

Juzo spins a top and watches as a fierce tabby chases it. "Honestly? Not a chance. It wasn't *exactly* my best lie."

"Hey, I think dental hygiene is super important. Insufficient brushing is a real menace, but luckily we've got heroes like you to—"

Juzo grabs one of Shihai's many pillows and throws it at the guy's smirking face. He smiles, glad for the return of this easy, slightly flirty camaraderie. Maybe this is enough. At least for now. After all, there's no rush, right?

The rest of the night is spent herding kittens and trying to entertain the little ones with non-breakable play options (after a near miss with one of Shihai's collectible models). Feeding time is a real chaotic interlude, the boys triple reading the directions on the kitten milk they picked up on the way home. One by one, seven hungry little mouths suckle at two clumsily held mini-syringes. It takes a few tries before the boys figure out how to get through a feeding without coating their fingers (and clothes) with the specially-formulated milk.

Still, the look on Juzo's face when the kittens latch on is worth an extra load of laundry. *He's so dreamy.* Shihai can't believe he hasn't been snatched up already. Shihai's brought back to earth when a demanding kitten nibbles his fingers, eager for another serving.

"Alright, alright. Boy, you sure are a little hellion, huh?"

Finally well-fed, the kittens seem ready to sleep. Which...ends up being its own problem, actually. Everytime they're left to their own devices, they seem to find the worst possible places to disappear into. Not to mention, the internet says that babies as little as them need help generating body heat, so they can hardly let them break off into cliques or solo acts. Shihai's the one who suggests it:

"Well, normally they'd sleep curled up on their Mama's belly, so we could replicate that? Make an inescapable playpen with our bodies, keep them from murdering themselves in the night."

"That's a..." Juzo was going to mention what a great name 'Kitten Murder' would be for a metal band, but then his brain catches up with his mouth.

*With our bodies.*

That's....the only way that makes sense is if Shihai's suggesting that they sleep face to face, with the kittens between them. Together. All night.

Juzo fully loses control of his blush, eventually managing little more than a strangled, "O-kay." It's for the kittens. Just a standard hero's sacrifice. Yep. He borrows a pair of sweatpants and a band tee from Shihai, clambering into bed and trying not to totally expose just how surreal this all is.

Luckily, the kittens help. Each wrangled meower is plopped into his waiting arms, and when all seven are accounted for, Shihai hits the lights and slides into the cuddle pile. The darkness and the difficulty of arranging kittens give Juzo just enough deniability to hide his panicked feelings.

Every time he starts to spiral into thinking about spending the night in his crush's room, a kitten bites his nose or burrows into his shirt or tumbles over and he's blissfully distracted. At least until he hears Shihai's giggles in the night, or feels a foot brush against his.

Damn, but why do feelings have to be so *scary*?

Lights out, one of them reaches for the other's

hand, silently, ready to pretend it's an accident, if he pulls away. But he doesn't. They twine their fingers together, still not speaking. Neither could tell you who made the first move, but they're both breathless with excitement at the new development. Who knows how long they stay hyperfocused on the feel of one another's calloused palms.

Somehow, despite everything, the two boys slip into dreams. Their subconscious minds must be braver than their waking ones, because when Shihai cracks open his eyes against the slits of morning sun that have escaped his blackout curtains, it's to a surprising sight:

Not only are they still holding hands, but he's evidently snaked his arm around Shihai's toned waist.

As the kittens react to his movement and erupt in a chorus of hungry cries, he screws his eyes shut and pretends to still be asleep. He wants to know how Juzo will react. He just needs a little encouragement, a little proof, and he'll be brave enough to step out of the shadows and do this by daylight. Yeah.

This is just information gathering.

Which is why, when Juzo jolts to life three kitten licks and ten seconds later, it's to a suspiciously snoring Juzo and his own chance to assess this new paradigm. Hand holding. Waking up together. Feeling Shihai's minty breaths flow across their shared space. Juzo uses his thumb to run experimental circles along Shihai's pitchy palm, heart hammering. So last night wasn't a dream, but the start of something real.

Something that begins today. He squeezes Shihai's palm, all sparked wonder and bated breaths. He promised to be brave, so he keeps the eye contact as Shihai 'wakes up' for the second time that morning.

They stay connected until the kittens demand they separate. Through feeding, tooth brushing, and a run to Juzo's room for fresh clothes, they skirt the topic of their newfound intimacy. As they smuggle the seven kittens back out of the dorm and towards the vet, they maintain their platonic chatter, but with a twist:

The whole walk over, they're holding hands.



"Everything sounds good, but we'll need to hold them for a few weeks to wean them. Thank you for being such responsible young men. Have a gummy!"

There's a shared glance, and Shihai moves into Juzo's space, stage whispering, "Is it just me, or is she *maybe* related to Recovery Girl?"

"Ask for a kiss and find out for sure."

Shihai smacks Juzo lightly and uses the contact as an excuse for another hand hold. *It's really becoming an addiction.* They're ushered out of the office with a packet of paperwork and a promise that they'll get called with any issues and before the little ones go up for adoption (just in case they want to keep a kitten or two).

They walk back home, once again holding hands, and the lack of shadows to hide in (or kittens to be distracted by) emboldens Juzo. He tightens his grip on Shihai's hand and pulls the other boy to a stop. He's a hero in training. He can be brave. He starts in on a speech, but the words turn to mud in his mouth, and he feels his blush spread.

"Listen, Shihai...*I really- um...That is...*"

He's drowning in everything he wants to say. So instead, he does the next best thing: he goes in for a kiss, all or nothing. His nerves and newness at this mean that he misses the mark a little, accidentally kissing the side of Shihai's mouth, but the other boy is happy to adjust.

Last night, their feelings and faces were hidden in shadow and uncertainty, but today, it's all out in the open. It's scary and bright and new, but Shihai thinks that maybe that's okay. As long as he's got Juzo by his side, he's pretty sure he can handle anything, even a kitten or two.





@skootleskittle







Witchy chuu







# Beautiful Brain

Writer, BUNBUN

Juzo twiddled his fingers as they were almost next in line to hand in their tickets to go to the local fair. Behind them was Monoma and Kendou, Monoma kept playing with her Ponytail and was slapped on the wrist in retaliation.

Who did Juzo go with you may ask?

Kuroiro, his current crush. He had 2 tickets for the All Might themed park and wanted to go with his best friend. Kuroiro surprisingly said yes, and Juzo practically clicked his heels when he was out of sight of his crush.

He realized anything yet and didn't want to Kuroiro to think he was ignoring him.

"So, uh what do you want to ride first?" Juzo broke the silence between them. Well, as silent as you can get at a

"We should go on that." He said pointing up at the tall loopy roller coaster that most of the screaming he was hearing came from.

Juzo looked up at it and gulped audibly, trying to keep the dread growing in his stomach. Juzo laughed nervously, "you sure? You won't be too scared, right?" giving Kuroiro a raised skeptical brow.

"Course not! That thing is for babies!" Kuroiro gave back a hearty laugh, showing off his practically glowing teeth that stood out beautifully against his vanta-black skin. Juzo thought his teeth were brighter than any star in the night sky tonight.

"Yeah... babies." Juzo looked away nervously, trying to think of something else to say.

"You know Zo-zo, we don't have to go on it if you don't want to." Kuroiro put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, Kuroiro knew he didn't want to pressure his

friend into anything.

"Psh, nah! I'm gonna do it!" Juzo waved his hand dismissively, giving a chuckle.

"Tickets please?" A medium sized kid said, weaseling his way into their conversation. There weren't any other defining features except his traffic light green hair. His name tag that almost was lost in the mess of buttons that covered his vest said "Usowa" in block letters.

Juzo handed them to Usowa and smiled. "Did you buy these tickets legally?" Usowa squinted his eyes at him, seeming to analyze his facial movements.

"Yes." Juzo felt a drop of sweat run down his face. He bought those tickets fair and square but the ticket guy made it seem like he ripped them out of a kid's hand.

The kid's eyes turned an opaque green, and he gave a big smile as they turned back to normal. "Just joshin' around dude! Gotta make sure your telling the truth! Go on in!" He said pulling out a roll of blue tickets and taking off 2 long strips and handing it to them.

"Well that was... interesting." Kuroiro laughed a bit as they walked towards the tall roller coaster. Juzo stuffed the tickets into the small Present Mic backpack he was wearing. "He had to make sure I didn't steal from a kid!" Juzo laughed loudly, his eyes crinkling and letting out little snorts. Kuroiro's cheeks dusted a light white color, strikingly different from dark skin.

They approached the roller coaster line quickly, excited that the line was fairly short. They stood in line and chatted happily about who was gonna blow chunks first on the behemoth of a roller coaster. Juzo stopped the conversation, reaching into his backpack to grab two tickets. He handed them to the ancient looking ride operator, her long bony fingers grabbing the tickets out of his hands slowly.

Juzo absentmindedly grabbed Kuroiro's hand as they walked into one of the coaster cars and sat in a seat. Kuroiro blushed a bit, not minding the warmth of his not surprisingly soft hands. Juzo let go of his hand abruptly, putting an end to their short lived bromance moment.

"Aw jeez, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to do that!" Juzo's cheeks were colored a bright crimson from embarrassment as he tried to explain himself. "Zo-zo, relax! It's alright, don't worry about it." He put a comforting hand on his friend's shoulder. Though disappointed to hear that it was just a fluke, Juzo's happiness is what mattered more.

Juzo took a nice long deep breath to calm himself, giving Kuroiro his version of a smile which is to say his face didn't change but he knew the difference. Kuroiro smiled back, his bright teeth practically blinding him. Juzo playfully shielded his face, letting out an "I'm blind!" for effect. A brown-haired attendant came over to every seat to bring down their place holders until it clicked in place after checking each one. Kuroiro looked at Juzo nervously but tried covering it up with a fake smile. Juzo frowned a bit but didn't say anything.

"Please keep your arms and legs inside the ride at all times, and remember don't lose your head!" An old woman's voice came in through the feedback prone speaker, giving a bit of an evil laugh.

The ride started its steep climb towards the first drop, the creaking and clunking of the old coaster filling their ears. "Kuroiro if I don't make it, tell my mom I love her." Juzo said as they crept closer and closer to the top, getting farther and farther from the station.

"If you don't make it, what makes you think I will?" His voice shaking slightly because of the bumps. Before Juzo could retort, they were stuck to their seats as the force of going down pushed them back.

Kuroiro felt his stomach flip twice as his cheeks flapped from the wind, his eyes watering from the air rushing into them. Juzo raised his hands up in the air, laughing as they went through the 1st loop.

After 5 minutes they arrived at a stop, hearing pained groans from the other passengers. The attendants came over to each seat and released everyone from their chairs.

"That was awesome-," Juzo interrupted himself, noticing that Kuroiro looked a bit green in the face. "Are you okay?" He asked, helping Kuroiro out of the car

because he was stumbling a bit.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just shouldn't have gone on a roller coaster with an empty stomach." He rubbed his stomach, feeling it rumble under his fingers.

"You wanna share some funnel cake?" Juzo pointed a thumb towards a small funnel cake truck a little way away from the rollercoaster.

"You had me at funnel cake! Let's go, cupcake!" Kuroiro immediately perked up at the thought of a powdery oily confectionary, not the best thing for a supposedly queasy stomachache. Juzo blushed at the nickname but was glad Kuroiro was feeling better.

As they were walking out towards the truck, Juzo caught glimpse of Jiro holding her hand on Momo's back, Momo looked about ready to blow chunks at any moment. He attempted to go over and see if she was okay, but he was hauled away towards the funnel truck.

"You want a soda, zo-zo?" Kuroiro had the plate of powdered funnel cake already in his hands. "Uh sure! I would like a coca cola please!" He asked the very young looking peppy cashier. "Sure thing!" She said, holding an empty cup in her hands. She looked at it for a second, seeming to criticize the quality. She waved a hand in front of it and looked at them to make sure they were watching. She waved her hand in front of it again, and the cup already had a straw and lid on it. Juzo clapped his hands together, taking the ice-cold drink from her outstretched hand. "Neat trick! Did you learn that?" Kuroiro stepped into view from the side.

"Technically yes! But it's my quirk, I can do magic tricks!" The girl reached over and pulled a coin from behind his ear and with a wave of her hand, it was gone. They both stared at her in curiosity on where it would end up.

"Check your pocket!" She said giddily, putting her hands on the cool metal counter. Juzo checked his jacket pocket and sure enough pulled out a gold coin. He smiled and tried handing it back to her, but she shook her head.

"Keep it, I can always make more!" She demonstrated by waving her hand and producing a handful of coins but made all but one of them disappear just as fast. She handed the shiny gold coin to him.

"A gift from me to you guys!"

They both waved her goodbye accompanied with many thanks for the coins to keep as souvenirs. They sat down at one of the wooden tables covered in graffiti and dug into the still warm, powdery confection.



They both ate in silence, looking around at all the flashing lights and people walking past. "So." Juzo asked, holding onto the note for a bit longer than he needed.

"Wanna go in the photo booth?" Kuroiro suggested, leaning his cheek onto his open palm.

"Sure!" Juzo said bit too excited, though it was drowned out by the many sounds of the carnival.

Kuroiro smiled, getting up to throw away his plate. Juzo still wasn't done with his soda, so he took it with them. Just before they got there, a redhead and a mean looking blonde go to the photobooth first.

"Shit." Juzo said without realizing, before covering his mouth. Kuroiro gave him a Cheshire-like grin, letting him know he heard his sudden outburst.

"I mean shoot! You know what I mean!" The blonde covered up his face with one of his hands, trying to will his sudden blush away.

"Zo-zo, chillax! It happens to the best of us!" Kuroiro put a hand on his shoulder" giving him a tiny shake. The slightly shorter took his hand off his face when he heard shouting coming from the booth.

The blonde was shouting obscenities as he dragged a laughing redhead out of the box. He snatched the 2 picture strips from its placeholder and stomped away with redhead in tow.

"What do you think that was all about?" Juzo asked as they climbed into the booth. "Beats me." He shrugged, smiling a bit.

"Please enter one dollar into the slot." The machine instructed.

Juzo pulled his wallet out from his backpack, taking out a wrinkled dollar bill.

"Jeez Zo-zo, do you crumple your money before you put it in your wallet?" Kuroiro asked when he saw the state of the bill.

"Oh hush! Sometimes I don't have time." He put the dollar into the vending machine like contraption.

"Please look into the camera." The machine displayed their faces on the screen along with a 5 second countdown.

"I'm pretty sure I looked cross eyed in one of these." Kuroiro said as he climbed out of the small booth, Juzo following behind him.

"Well it won't matter; it's supposed to be funny!" Juzo shrugged, grabbing the strips and handing one to the white-haired boy.

"Hey! These actually look pretty good!" Kuroiro gave his back to Juzo for safe keeping inside of his backpack.

"So, what do you wanna do next?"

"Ferris wheel!" Kuroiro ran his way towards the giant Ferris Wheel, grabbing Juzo's hand like he did to him earlier. It didn't feel as awkward as before, it felt right.

People quickly got out of their way, Juzo yelling out apologies towards the people they accidentally did hit when they didn't move in time.

They made it to the surprisingly short line, almost smashing into the back of the line. Kuroiro was buzzing with contagious excitement, hopping up and down on his toes. Juzo smiled, he's never seen Kuroiro this happy especially for something like a ride.

After twenty minutes they were next in line, the attendant opening the gate after receiving enough tickets for 3 rides in a row. They both put on their seatbelts, breathing a sigh when they heard the click. The attendant locked the gate, giving them a thumbs up and a smile.

Juzo got the familiar tickle in his stomach when they started going up, the cart swinging a hit as Juzo got comfortable in the plastic seat.

Juzo always loved coming here with his Mom, they would always have memories good and bad to go home with every time. He did feel a bit sad that he couldn't go with his mom this year but he had someone good to go with so he felt a bit better.

Speaking of someone good, he was here with his crush of a year and a half! Ever since first year, he's been harboring this crush on his best friend. He felt like he had no chance first year when Kuroiro had a crush on Kinoko, it hurt his chest just thinking about it. But then something changed second year, Juzo got to know Kuroiro a lot better than he already did. He would share secrets with him, invite him to places that he usually went by himself, stuff he never did with anyone else that Juzo knew of.

This made Juzo's crush even harder to get rid, but some part of him didn't want to. It made him feel giddy and alive, like he got a sudden boost of adrenaline.

"Zo-zo? You alright?" Kuroiro waved his hand in front of Juzo's, snapping him out of his thoughts.

"Kuroiro, I have to tell you something!" Juzo said, determination set in stone.

"Yes?" Kuroiro gave his blond friend all his attention, something he always did when he was speaking.

"I like you, as in more than a friend. I just really needed to get it off my chest before it ate me up inside." Juzo didn't dare turn towards Kuroiro, scared he would see something he didn't like.

Juzo swallowed hard, the taste bitter on his tongue. Kuroiro let out a sigh of relief.

"Well that's relieving, 'cause I like you too zo-zo." Kuroiro turned Juzo's face towards his gently.

"You do?" Juzo felt like crying at this point and inhaled sharply when he felt soft lips on his cheek.

"Yes." They both momentarily forgot that they were on a Ferris Wheel, already feeling weightless themselves.

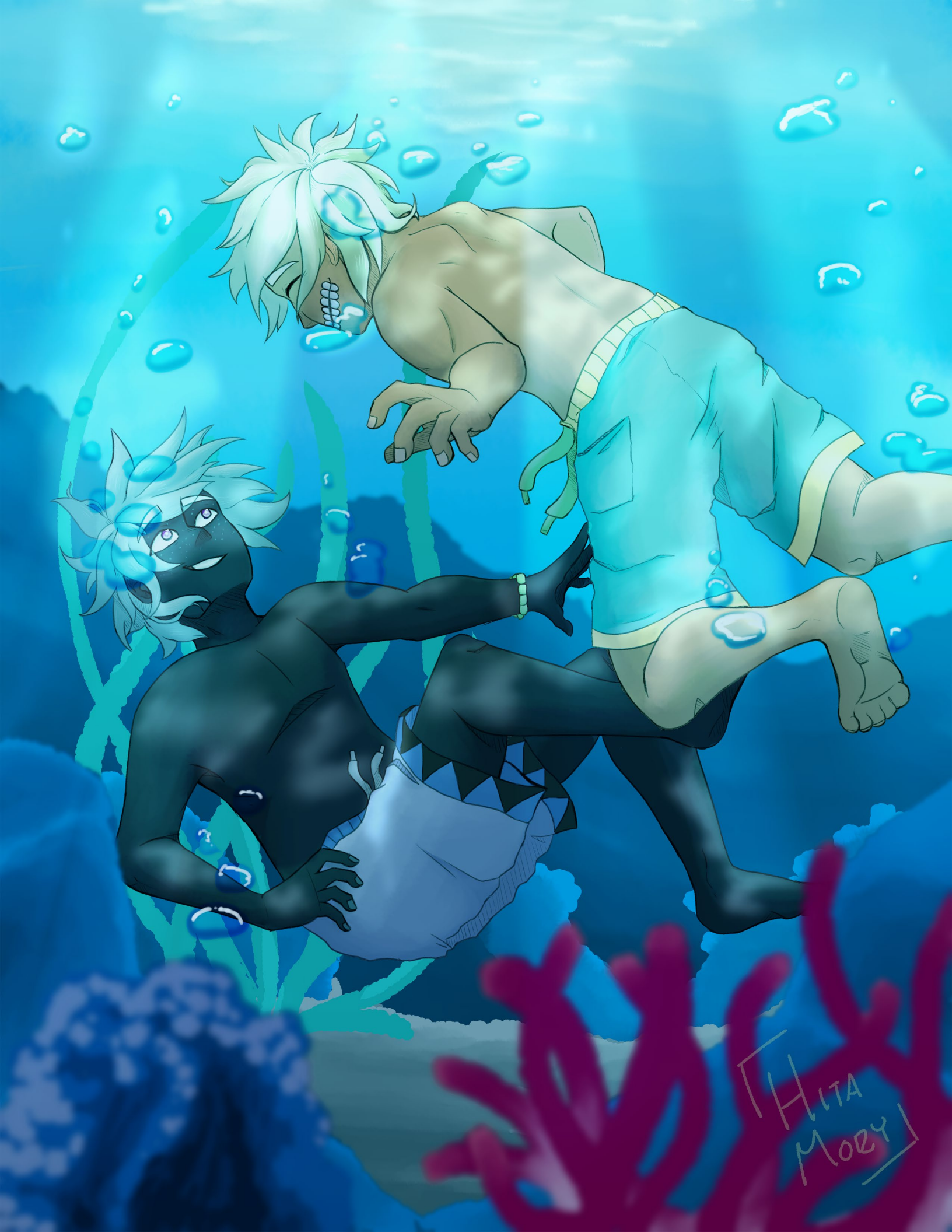












HITA  
MOBY

# Reflections

## Writer, Lilac-rabbits

*Crunch.*

*Crunch.*

*Crunch.*

The sound of feet stepping on fallen leaves filled the air. Several sets of footsteps were heard in tandem of each other, the pace an easy-going yet steady one. The group was a bit of an odd sight to any passing travelers. Three humans, a half-dragon, a centaur, a cervitaur, and a changeling. Certainly not the *average* group that one would find.

Then again, the people within the group weren't very average either, so that was to be expected.

A few more minutes of walking.

"Hey guys?" Pony called from ahead of them, an ear flicking as the centaur turned to look at them. "The sun is starting to drop a bit. Think we should set up camp?"

"Probably for the best." Hitoshi said, the changeling shrugging. "I mean, me, you, an' Juzo could probably touch out the night, but the others aren't as adapted to harsher weather, so..." he shrugged again.

"Better safe than sorry." Shouto finished the sentence for him.

"Yeah." A nod from the purple-haired boy.

"I could still sleep on the ground, if it would give the rest of you more room to sleep." Juzo offered, wings tucking themselves behind his back.

"No, you're going to join us in the tent." Shihai replied immediately.

"But I don't *need* to." Juzo pointed out. "I'm half-dragon. If I get rained on or it's cold or things like that,

it won't really bother me."

"Yeah, well, it'll bother *me*," Shihai said stubbornly, "so we're gonna set up this tent, and then you're going to join the rest of us in sleeping underneath of it on a soft blanket."

"If you insist." Juzo said, then helped with the setting up of their camp.

It took a few minutes, but a camp was set up for the night. Nothing too special - mainly just a shelter that they could sleep under. In favor of smaller tents that needed to be carried around, the group as a whole had pitched in to get one large tent that they could all sleep under should the weather necessitate it. As it was in late autumn, the group had decided that it would be better to pitch up the tent and let the body heat stay trapped within the canvas walls.

Juzo lay on his side, wings and tail tucked around himself and Shihai, and reflected back on how he'd gotten to here in the first place.



Juzo had been younger when it had really started. A hatchling still, only a few years old. His wings were still small and not grown very much, as was his tail, and his claws and horns weren't much more than dull little nubs. Regardless, a seven-year-old Juzo had liked life. He might have been smaller than his sisters, and younger, but that was okay. He had his older sisters and his moms to protect him if anything bad happened.

Now, dragon hatchlings were naturally curious. And this fact extended to *half*-dragons as well. So it was no wonder when Juzo began trying to see the world outside of the sheltered area that his mother had made a nest for he and his siblings. His chubby little limbs weren't very long, but he had the help of the oldest sister, and soon the seven half-dragon



hatchlings were over the rim of the nest and on the colder grass of the clearing area.

“Let’s go explore!” Kasei said, running ahead of the other six on all fours. They all collectively scrambled after her, not knowing where they were going, but following her all the same.

They reached an end to the patch of forest after some minutes. Dragons were quite fast, after all. It had an area that was like a clearing, but bigger, with less grass on the ground and wooden structures built in an odd fashion. (Juzo would later learn that it was a town. Not a major one, but not a minor one either. Mama would explain to him that he had to be careful in and around towns, because some humans trusted dragons, and some did not, and many wanted to hurt Juzo just because he was half one. He remembered that conversation well.)

“Wait, Kasei!” Hogaraka called in vain, as the beige-haired girl ran forwards to explore. “We can’t go in yet!”

“Why not?” Kasei pouted, stopping just away from being past the tree line.

“Mama said it was dangerous.” Hogaraka said, crossing her arms, wings flared out behind her in an attempted intimidation tactic. It was hindered by the fact that they all were still young and chubby, and that Hogaraka wasn’t particularly taller than Kasei.

“Fine-e-e.” Kasei whined, dragging the last syllable out. “Let’s go explore the forest more then!” She ran off deeper into the forest, and most of their sisters followed her.

Naosu didn’t leave, though, and neither did Juzo. She looked at him, black eyes holding a questioning look. “Not going to follow the others?”

“You’re not following them either.” He said.

Naosu giggled. “Yeah! That’s ‘cus I wanna look at the town.”

“But didn’t Hogaraka say Mama said we couldn’t?” Juzo asked, tilting his head just a little.

“She didn’t say we couldn’t *look* at the town. Just that we couldn’t go in.”

Juzo hummed. “Can we look at it?”

Naosu beamed. “Yeah! I know a good spot to watch from.”

The two half-dragons ran through the brush and the edge of the forest, stopping once they reached an older fallen log. Juzo saw a small space in-between the log and the earthen ground; it looked almost like a cave. It looked fun to play in, at least. He got on all fours and began crawling into the small, darker space, when-

Oh.

“Hi.” He said, to the boy with pale skin and white hair who was in the space as well.

The boy looked up. Red eyes were partially blocked by the large amount of tears running down his face. He sniffed and rubbed at his eyes. “Hi.” He said back quieter.

“Are you okay?” Juzo asked, crawling further into the space to sit next to the other boy.

“No.” He answered, and it was a mix of a whine and a sob. “My momma and papa are fighting and yelling at each other again. It’s scary.”

“I’m sorry.” Juzo said, more quietly. He shuffled a bit closer to the boy and wrapped one of his smaller wings around him. “My mom puts her wings around me when I’m feeling scared.” He said to the white-haired boy. “So maybe it can help you?”

The boy sniffed again. “Thanks.”

“Of course.” Juzo said. “What’s your name?”

“Shihai.” He rubbed his eyes again and leaned on Juzo’s shoulder. “What’s your name?”

“Juzo.”

“Thanks, Juzo.”

“You’re welcome, Shihai.”

They sat like that for a few minutes, before Shihai wiggled out of Juzo’s wing-hug and peeked over the outside of the log. “I gotta go now.” He said, looking not quite at Juzo.

“Okay.” Juzo said, giving Shihai a quick wing-hug.

“Thank you.” Shihai said again. “For . . . hugging me.” He was still a moment, halfway out of the smaller tree-cave, before he reached forwards and gave Juzo a hug of his own. “See you tomorrow? Here again?”

"Okay!" Juzo said again. "See you tomorrow!"

"Bye, Juzo." Shihai said, ducking out of the cave fully.

"Bye, Shihai!"

Shihai, as promised, came back the next day.

"Are you okay?" Juzo asked, as soon as he got there.

"Yeah. I said I'd come back, and I did."

"Yeah, but," Juzo explained, his hands clutching each other, "you were here yesterday because you were scared." Behind him, his tail twitched in a nervous habit, and he focuses his eyes on Shihai.

"Well, today I'm here 'cause I want to spend time with you." Shihai declared, hands on his hips. In a quieter tone, he added, "unless you don't want me here?"

Juzo quickly shook his head, ears hitting the sides of his face from how fast the back-and-forth motion was. "No, I want you here!" He said, grabbing Shihai's hands.

Shihai smiled at him, tentatively. "I'm glad." It was a soft and quiet admission. In a louder voice he asked, "so what do you want to do?"

"I know lots of stuff we can do!" Juzo said excitedly, and, still holding Shihai's hands, started walking towards a place to play.

This would set the pattern for future interactions with Shihai; the two of them would meet up at the fallen tree, then adventure off to wherever they were going on that day. Most of the time it was just clearings that they could sit, talk, or play-fight in. Sometimes they went up to the waterfall - Shihai's stunned look of wonder at the crashing water and the song of the river had been worth Mom and Mama's concern over why Juzo was soaked and smelled like river fish.

Then there was the day that they went to the Rotting Woods. The woods themselves were mostly intact, actually, but the entire grounds were filled with an oozy dark type of magic.

"They say that a necromancer who made a deal with a demon died here, and that's why the rot-magic is here." Juzo hushedly explained to Shihai.

"Are you sure we have to go in?" The white-haired

boy replied, nervously shifting his weight at the edge of the forest.

"Well, it *was* your idea." Juzo replied, tail and wings twitching again. "But we don't have to go in if you don't want to."

"No, I want to go in!" Shihai protested suddenly, before seeming to withdraw into himself and continuing in a quieter voice. "If we can."

Casting aside his own worries, Juzo nodded. "Okay." He said. "If that's what you want to do."

Shihai hesitated a moment, before nodding as well, and the two of them stepped over the invisible border between the Rotting Woods and the rest of the forest. Immediately as they did so, Juzo felt like something slimy was crawling all over him and shuddered.

"You okay?" Shihai asked, concerned, from beside him.

"Yeah. Death magic like the kind in this forest just... Doesn't feel good to animals. That's why I can sense it - I'm half dragons, and dragons are still kinda animals, even if they're smart and have magic." He counted their steps as they walked. It was probably superstition that you had to count them in the Rotting Woods or else you'd never get out, but - well, one could never be too careful.

"Oh. I'm sorry." Shihai reached over and intertwined one of his hands with Juzo's. "Is that why there isn't anything moving in this part of the forest?"

Juzo wordlessly nodded.

"We can leave if it isn't making you feel good." Shihai offered quietly.

"No!" Juzo turned to look at the albino. "You wanted to be here, and I want to make you happy. Besides," he added in a less serious tone, "it's not as bad after a few seconds."

"Are you sure?" Shihai asked again, nervously. Juzo once again nodded wordlessly.

It was a few minutes of poking around some of the trees before either of them spoke again. "How come you wanted to come in here, anyways?" Juzo asked, head tilted to look at Shihai.

"I... dunno." He admitted. "I guess I kinda... felt something calling me to enter. Not in a 'come here



little child, I will magically solve all your problems as long as you do as I ask' kind of way that makes you think that the person is just trying to use you. More of a 'hey I have something for you if you come get it, I don't need it and you might' kind of way."

Juzo hummed thoughtfully. "Less of a compulsion and more of a summons?"

Shihai blinked. "I... guess so?" He shrugged. "It's just a general kind of feeling, I guess."

They fell back into silence for a few seconds. "Wanna go find wherever the king is coming from?" Juzo offered. "I can help."

"You'd do that? For me?" There was a small bit of amazement in Shihai's eyes, the sane amazement that showed up whenever Juzo did something nice for Shihai, or shared a beautiful view with Shihai, or just was around Shihai.

Juzo smiled. "Of course."

Shihai looked like he wanted to say something, and tears were welling in his eyes, but he only nodded and rubbed at his eyes. "Let's go, then." And if his voice was a bit choked, his eyes a bit more red and puffy then they had been before, well, Juzo wasn't going to comment on it.

They walked for an unknowable amount of time, onwards and onwards as Shihai followed his internal compass to the strongest point of the feeling. The Rotting Woods was in a half-dawn state of time, with dim light filtering through the thick forest canopy ahead, the stillness and silence of the place only adding to its unnaturalness. Even for all the surrounding area, the only sound Juzo could hear was he and Shihai's footsteps, breathing, and the quiet crooning whispers of the dark magic.

"It's here." Shihai said, and the sudden noise made Juzo jump slightly, wings instinctual half-unfurled should he need to get away.

"You're sure?" The beige-haired half-dragon asked, folding his wings back into place, tucked against his back.

Shihai nodded. "Here."

It was an old, old stump of a tree felled centuries ago. Weathered and aged, it somehow seemed ageless in the timeless space that was the Rotting Woods.

Slowly, Shihai reached out to touch it. For a second, nothing happened. Then -

A cocoon of energy, shifting in color from black to dark purple to dark green, surrounded Shihai and the tree stump, and from half-closed eyes and ears filled with the screaming melody of dark magic climb upon his soul and tearing at it, Juzo thought he heard Shihai screaming.

In the second it took for that to happen, it was over. The stillness of the forest had returned in full force, and the dark magic had left Juzo's mind entirely. *Shihai*. Scrambling on all fours, Juzo desperately searched for the boy that had become half of his heart.

"Shihai!" He called, growing panicked. "*Shihai!*"

From behind the nearest tree came a breath. Ignoring the instincts telling him that *something is wrong*, he scrambled towards Shihai, ears flat against his skull and tail tucked between his legs. "Shihai!" He cried out again, and Shihai opened his eyes, dazed and blinking.

"Juzo...?" His voice was quiet, but against the forest it was as if he'd shouted.

Juzo threw himself down against Shihai, arms wrapping around his chest and pulling him tight. "I'm glad you're okay." He said, voice thick and choked from used tears.

"Juzo?" Shihai asked again.

Juzo pulled away from where his face had been pressed into Shihai's chest and looked to where his finger was pointing. "Was that tree always there?"

"I... I think I did that." Shihai said, softly, voice stunned as the rest of him.

The tree was tall and standing strong, and Juzo somehow knew that it was the same tree that had been the stump. A thought came to Juzo, and a small pit formed in his stomach.

"I'm a necromancer." Shihai said it for him, and he looked down at his hands, fingertips stained black from the use of the magic. They both were silent for a few moments, before Shihai suddenly burst into tears.

Juzo immediately began trying to comfort him and help him calm down. "Hey hey hey, Shihai, hey, it's okay, we're both okay, it's okay. . ."

"I'm sorry," Shihai said, sniffing and trying not to cry loudly.

"What for?" Juzo asked softly, shuffling so that Shihai was in his lap and leaning against him.

"I'm a necromancer. That means I use dark magic." Shihai sniffled again. "That means I'm gonna scare you."

Oh. "Hey, it's okay," Juzo tried again. "You're not gonna scare me. Promise."

"But—"

"No buts." Juzo told Shihai firmly. His voice softened. "You're one of the most important things to me. I promise that I won't be scared of you just because you're a necromancer."

Shihai sniffled again. "I don't want to lose you. I love you."

Juzo sighed and wrapped his wings and tail around Shihai as he continued the hug. "I love you too, Shihai." They sat there for a few minutes more, before Juzo stood and dragged Shihai up with him. "Come on, you. We should get home."

Rubbing his eyes a final time, Shihai nodded. "Yeah."



From next to him in the tent, Shihai tapped Juzo on the nose, startling him out of his thoughts. "What're you thinking about, dork?" His voice was soft, as was the small smile on his face and the look in his eyes.

"I'm thinking about when we first said aloud that we loved each other." Juzo replied, stretching his arms and legs before settling back down.

Shihai laughed quietly, reaching an arm out to cup Juzo's face. "Yeah, that was something, wasn't it? We go into the woods cursed by a necromancer and boom, I'm a necromancer."

"I think that that's a coincidence, love." Juzo yawned and shuffled to be next to Shihai in a loose embrace.

"Maybe so." Shihai replied, eyelids fluttering. "Maybe so."

"We should sleep."

"Yeah, probably."

They fell to an easy, comfortable silence, and as their breathing evened out, Juzo let his mind wander to thoughts of Shihai. A smile on his face and his lover on his mind, Juzo drifted off to sleep. It was going to be okay. Things would be alright, as long as they were together.

"Goodnight, Shihai." He whispered gently.

"Night." Was the response.

And then they slept.









# Recommendations

Writer, RAYRAY

"As I'm sure you already know, four students have earned their places on the hero course through recommendations alone. Class 1-A, you will be joined by Shouto Todoroki and Momo Yaoyorozu. Class 1-B, you will have Juzou Honenuki and Setsuna Tokage becoming members of your class."

It's the fastest way to paint a target on somebody's back. Some would argue the morality of deliberately setting up rivalries between classmates, but UA had always stood by the unique policies. Rivalry was key in the industry, after all – without the motivation to constantly improve, heroes would become far too complacent. As threats to peace slowly grew stronger, it was essential to encourage heroes to keep up.

A week after students had settled in, it was standard procedure to fill the remaining four places on the hero course with students recommended to the school by powerful figures within the hero industry. Avoiding the rigorous entrance examinations, these students were instantly placed on a pedestal among their classmates, sparking the famed competitive environment UA prided itself upon. It's a brutal process, however, as the late students often seem to have difficulty in making friends and settling into the class dynamic within the first semester.

On the polished oak coffee table, four student profiles were laid out. Stamped across the top of each one, in bold red text, was the word RECOMMENDATION.

"So, how are yours holding up? It's not long until the end of the first semester now, so I'm pretty sure Nezu is gonna start chasing us up for a report any time now." Kan began, placing a steaming mug of coffee onto the table before him.

"Yaoyorozu seems to be handling it the way students normally do," the dark-haired teacher opposite murmured. "She struggles to interact with her classmates on a personal level, but...I think she'll

be past the worst of it before the semester ends. Even though she's talented, she seems to lack confidence in her decision-making."

The other teacher hummed thoughtfully, tilting his head to one side questioningly. "Her recommendation letter suggested excellent leadership skills."

Aizawa nodded, eyes flicking between the man before him and Yaoyorozu's photo. "She possesses the qualities of a great leader. She just needs to stop second guessing herself," he responded. "It would appear the pressure of being surrounded by immense talent has made Yaoyorozu begin to question her own abilities."

"I see..." Kan mused, nodding slowly. "And Todoroki?"

The sound of papers shuffling filled the silence momentarily, before Aizawa began to speak. "He's...not what I expected. Nothing like his father. Hasn't really attempted making any friends."

"Really? I was expecting a spit of Enji, if I'm honest. All hot temper and dominance." Kan mused. "I saw him training after school a few times. That quirk isn't one to underestimate."

"It's not. But we all know that's what *he* wanted." Aizawa retorted, unable to keep the venom out of his voice. "Anyway. How are your students coming along?"

Kan smiled, glancing down at the two sheets before him. "Tokage is a total social butterfly. Despite the circumstances, she's easily one of the most well-liked in the class," he answered brightly. "I'm surprised she handled it so well, but she's pretty talkative. I've even seen her chatting with members of your class, Shouta."

"Surprising. The class rivalry seem particularly strong this year."

“Mm. Honenuki’s different, though. He isn’t totally isolated, but he seems to have gotten close with one member of the class more than the others. They’re practically inseparable half of the time.”

“Interesting,” Aizawa murmured, more to himself than his companion. “I suppose that’s everything we need to talk about. I’ll see you tomorrow, Sekijiro.”



Across campus, most students were returning to their dorms from evening study groups or additional training classes. The smallest dormitory blocks were allocated to the first years – one for females, and the other for males. Inside, each door had the respective student’s name etched onto a steel plaque, arranged in alphabetical order down the corridor. They were dismal and cramped, but the promise of improved accommodation in the second and third years made it bearable.

Shihai had taken to waiting for Juzou after evening classes. They both attended different training sessions, but had silently agreed to meet the other outside the main school building before making the short walk back together. More often than not, they walked in silence, simply enjoying each other’s companionship and the sunset colours painting the sky brilliant shades of pink and orange. Every so often, Shihai would launch into a dramatic retelling of anything memorable from the day, to which Juzou would normally offer up small comments and occasional laughter.

He almost had a strange sense of pride in seemingly being Juzou’s only friend. From the day they first met, he had inexplicably gravitated towards the other student. Most of their class had automatically taken against him, intimidated by his formidable technique and impressive control over his quirk, although some of the friendlier students had made attempts to get to know him a little. To an extent, his talents even scared Shihai a little, knowing that any sparring exercise they engaged in would quickly become a one-sided battle. But Shihai had been the only one successful in befriending him, and he was proud of that.

In his defence, normal hand-to-hand wasn’t his speciality. He’d much rather do undercover work.

Deep down, he knew there was far more to his feelings for Juzou than simple friendship. He could never truly accept this realisation however, given how often relationships between heroes crashed and burned. Relationships were complex as it were, and the

constant strain hero work put on that bond made them destined for failure, in his humble opinion. Besides, it’s not like he had any kind of experience. It was easier to deny his emotions rather than risk hurting his only friend.

“Hey! Shihai!” Juzou’s voice cut through Shihai’s internal monologue suddenly, causing the taller boy to blink hard before looking over at his companion. He only just managed to stop walking in time to avoid crashing into Juzou’s side, eyes widening in surprise at his friend’s sudden stop.

“Y-Yes?” he asked, slightly louder than intended.

Juzou raised an eyebrow at his friend questioningly, shaking his head briefly before continuing. “I was asking if you wanted to go over the notes for tomorrow’s test. It’s not too late yet.”

“Oh! Uh, yes, I don’t see why not,” Shihai stammered, still struggling to bring his mind back to reality.

“Are you alright?” Juzou asked, unlocking the door to his dormitory and pushing the door open, gesturing for Shihai to enter.

“I’m fine. Just...just considering tomorrow’s test,” he replied lamely. It was rare for anyone to catch him off guard in this manner – normally that was *his* thing!

Juzou seemed sceptical as he followed his friend into the room, choosing to drop the subject anyway. “I don’t think it’ll be too hard. The test, I mean. We’ve only been here one semester.”

“This is UA, however,” Shihai responded, immediately going to perch on the end of the Juzou’s bed. “It wouldn’t be unusual for them to test beyond our current knowledge to get a better idea of our full potential.”

Juzou hummed in response, grabbing a small stack of textbooks from his desk and placing them down on the bed. “Even so, it seems unfair to ask us questions we won’t know the answers to. How are we supposed to pass?”

“Maybe so. I suppose we’ll find out tomorrow,” the boy replied, bending over backwards and gracefully snatching up one of the textbooks. Flicking through the colourful pages, he turned to face Juzou once more. “Did Mr. Kan give us anything specific to study?”

Juzou shook his head, not looking up from the page he was currently reading. “Not really. He kept it



pretty open-ended.”

“That’s most irritating,” Shihai huffed quietly, returning to his own work.

They settled into working quietly for the next few hours, occasionally pausing to ask the other a question or comment on the textbook’s contents. The soft sounds of pens scratching against paper keep the quiet from becoming uncomfortable, and after an hour or so the sound of rain hitting the window panes merged into that background noise.

Around two hours had passed before Shihai leaned back, stretching himself out across Juzou’s bed with a silent yawn. “My back is killing,” he murmured, letting his eyes fall closed momentarily. “Don’t you think we’ve done enough studying tonight?” he asked, turning his face to meet his companion’s eyes.

Juzou looked up from his own work, frowning slightly. “I guess so,” he sighed, leaning back and rubbing his eyes tiredly. “I don’t want to fail, though. It’ll all seem pointless.”

Shihai sighed dramatically, propping himself up on an elbow to grab his friend’s wrists and force the shorter boy to look at him. Despite his cool demeanour, Juzou seemed endlessly worked up over his studies. “I’m pretty sure you’ll be just fine. When have you ever done badly in a class test?”

He frowned, opening his mouth to protest briefly, before shutting it again and letting the tension leave his shoulders. “Fine. You’re right. It’ll be fine.”

“Exactly,” Shihai replied triumphantly, letting himself flop back down onto the duvet. “You worry about schoolwork far too much. Nothing else seems to bother you like this.”

“I don’t like failing,” Juzou muttered, his voice barely audible.

The taller boy felt his heart pang at his friend’s vulnerability, rolling over to face him properly. “You’re not going to fail. You got here on recommendations.”

“That doesn’t mean anything at this point. There are plenty of super talented people in our class that got in the normal way. The only difference between us is the way we got accepted,” he countered, shaking his head. “I don’t see why people think I’m automatically better than the rest of you.”

“Probably because they’re scared of you,” Shihai

murmured softly. “People just assumed you were better than everyone because you were recommended, and it’s not like you don’t possess the ability to prove them right.”

Juzou sighed, resting his forehead against the cool, glossy pages of his textbook. “I’m not better than anyone,” he mumbled dejectedly, voice muffled by the book.

“You’re still extremely talented, though,” Shihai replied, sitting up properly and beginning to run his fingertips through the boy’s hair in what he hoped was a reassuring manner. It seemed to work – Juzou visibly relaxed under his touch, letting out a small sigh. “It’s going to be fine. Once people get over the whole recommendations thing, it’ll be like you joined in the normal way.”

The idea of Juzou having other friends hurt a little. Shihai couldn’t exactly place *why* the idea bothered him. Maybe it was envy – with louder, brighter members of their class vying for Juzou’s attention, it would be easy for him to be forgotten about. Among the large personalities his class seemed to be mostly comprised of, Shihai’s quieter nature made it easier to fade into the background. Some of their less regular teachers struggled to recall his name.

“Shihai? Are you alright?” Juzou asked, waving a hand in front of his face. Shihai blinked rapidly, once again broken out of his reverie.

“Y-Yes. Sorry, I...zoned out a little,” he muttered apologetically, thankful the dark colouration of his skin made any flush of embarrassment completely invisible.

Juzou frowned, his brow furrowing. “You’ve been doing that a lot lately. Are you sure nothing’s wrong?”

A few moments of silence ensued as he thought it over. Sure, Juzou felt comfortable enough to show his vulnerability, but that didn’t mean Shihai felt the same way. Explaining his envy at his friend settling into the class better sounded terrible in his head, and likely even worse out loud.

“I..I’m perfectly fine. I think I’m just...tired,” he replied, desperately trying to keep the nervousness out of his voice.

Juzou had shifted his textbook away, climbing onto the bed to sit behind Shihai. The taller boy let out a small noise of confusion, before his friend’s strong arms were wrapped around him. After a few seconds,

he relaxed into the other boy's embrace, letting his head rest on Juzou's chest.

"What's bothering you, Shihai?"

He took a deep breath. Better to just get it out there than let it fester, he reasoned.

"You would n-never forget me, would you?" Shihai asked nervously, tripping slightly on his words. His voice was slightly muffled by the fabric of Juzou's uniform, but he was certain the boy had heard him.

"What makes you think I would?" he asked, tone even and neutral.

"I...I just don't stand out very much. Amongst our classmates, I mean. And if you were friends with all of them, I was worried I might...you know...forget about me."

Juzou let out a soft sigh, running a hand down Shihai's spine soothingly. "I couldn't just forget you, Shihai. You're my best friend." he replied, his voice much softer than normal. "Nobody in this entire school could replace you. You mean a lot to me."

Shihai's heart leapt a little at the boy's words, fighting the urge to read into it more romantically than probably intended. He yawned silently, his mind at ease.

"You don't need to worry, Shihai."



Shihai didn't remember falling asleep. The last thing he could remember was Juzou's reassuring words and the warmth enveloping his body, and suddenly he was awake, still wrapped in the shorter boy's arms. It was surprisingly comfortable, despite their slightly awkward positioning on the bed. The other boy didn't stir as Shihai shifted into a slightly more comfortable position, squinting at the electric blue numbers on Juzou's alarm clock. 7:26am. They didn't have to be in class until 9am. A little longer couldn't possibly hurt.

"Shihai?" Juzou's voice murmured, the boy blinking blearily.

"Mm? We're not late, don't worry. Go back to sleep," Shihai replied softly, letting his eyes fall closed once more.

The boy grunted softly, before turning onto his side once more and seemingly falling asleep. Shihai's

heart fluttered at the action — the whole situation was comfortably domestic. Something he could get used to.

He hoped it would be something to grow more accustomed too.



# ARTISTS



## ASMRUOK

*Jay is a spunky artist, constantly working with different mediums and weird color palettes to create pieces that always manage to have pink in it. When not drawing, she's experimenting with jewelry and accessories for her small shop.*



## HITAMORY

*Hey, I'm Hita! I'm a self-taught digital artist and writer from Canada who loves lizards and cryptids.*

*You can find me on twitter, tumblr, deviantart, and instagram as @ hitamory!*



## KELLY LATHAM [website](#)

*I draw things! I also love traveling, mismatched socks, fuzzy blankets, and collecting rubber ducks.*



## MINT-MAYHEM

*guest artist*



## MINNOWMINN



## SKOOTLE



*Hello! I'm Skootle but almost everyone calls me Skoot! I've been drawing digitally for around 3 years now, and I never seem to be able to stick to one fandom. I mostly draw ocs + fanart, and I really love working with vibrant color palettes!*

*You can find me as @ skootleskittle on twitter/ tumblr/instagram!*



## SON



*guest artist*



## VIIYVERN



*Viiyvern, commonly referred to as Vii, usually can be found near art supplies or computer screens. This cryptic creature loves cute animals, drawing, and hoarding tones of favorite background characters and rare ships. She can be easily lured with any juzohai content, since these two precious halloween boys are extremely close to her dark heart.*

*You can also catch her on tumblr @viiyvern or instagram @viiyvernart.*

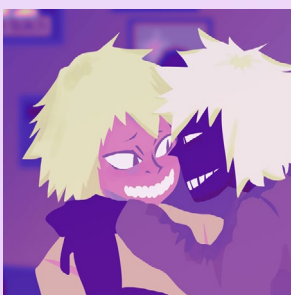


## WITCHYCHUU



*Hey, I'm Witchychuu!! I'm a digital artist, and a current art college student majoring in illustration!! I love drawing for zines, especially bnha ones, since it's one of my favorite shows! I hope to one day be a comic illustrator, and I draw a lot of witches and vampires, since I love supernatural characters!*

*You can find me on instagram and twitter as @ witchychuu , and tumblr as @ thatcutewitchybitch !*



## YOMOREE



*Hi, I'm Yomo! I'm a digital artist who is currently working really hard to pursue animation! I'm in love with pink and purple hues and try to incorporate such colours in my work wherever I can. My artwork is very reminiscent of magical girls and illustrations from children's books!*

*You can find me on twitter @ yomoreee or on tumblr/ instagram: @ yomoree.*





## WRITERS

**BUNBUN**



**LILAC-RABBITS**



*Hey there, I'm Storm! I'm a content creator of various forms and I tend to fall face first into rarepairs, often dragging a few friends into them as well. I actually happened to write the first juzohai fic on AO3, and it warms my heart to know that the love of the ship has grown enough for there to be an entire zine based around it! My interests wander around a lot, but I try my best to pour creativity and passion into everything I create.*

*You can find me on AO3 at Storm\_Clouds\_and\_Starshine, or at my tumblr @storm-clouds-and-starshine.*

**NATE NOX**



*An aspiring fandom writer and less successful fandom artist. I love focusing on rarepairs and characters who tend to fade into the background in fandom (and canon) works. My favorite feeling is when my writing convinces someone to stan characters or pairings that they've never considered before.*

*You can find me on AO3 or tumblr @tenyatrash.*

**RAYRAY**



## MODERATORS

**Vanilla (Chris) : Lead Mod**   

**Lavendar (Saturn) : Mod** 

**Silver (Lizard) : Graphic Designer** 

**Mint (Paigyloli) : Formatter**   



THANK YOU

